

ROCK WREN AT SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

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May 1984 was notable for its excessive heat and wind, which combined to form formidable dust storms in many areas of Saskatchewan. Saskatoon was not spared these conditions and thus it was not completely surprising, in retrospect, to find a bird that normally inhabits the arid southern areas of the province appear in my own backyard.

On 29 May I noticed a small bird hopping about in my backyard. At first I paid little attention, assuming it was another White-throated Sparrow or similar species. However, I soon noticed that this bird never flew to tree branches like most other species. Closer examination with binoculars indicated that I was observing a Rock Wren.

This species appeared to be slightly larger than the other wrens usually

observed in Saskatchewan, the upper parts were greyish brown, finely speckled, the rump was a cinnamon color and this color also appeared in part of the tail, which was subterminally tipped black. The breast was whitish, with fine streaks. To me, it's most identifiable field mark was its stance, a rather upright posture unlike the House or Marsh Wrens, and the fact that it would perch on my fence, deck, or hide under the furniture, but ignored the trees all around.

A quick check into all of my bird books was necessary before I put out a Rare Bird Alert to the Saskatoon members by telephone. Chris Escott arrived shortly after and confirmed my sighting. Members of long standing in Saskatoon inform me that a Rock Wren was seen in this city in 1974. I would be pleased to know if the Cathedral Peaks area at Tipperary Creek Heritage Site just north of Saskatoon would be a suitable habitat, as it is a south facing, arid cliff face which appears to qualify as a nest site. Perhaps this bird has been here but unobserved, since that site is only accessible by water.



Rock Wren

G.L. Holroyd